

The Influence of an Organisation's Corporate Values on Employees Personal Buying Behaviour

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ABSTRACT. This article explores the influence that an organisation's corporate values have on employees' behaviour and values both within and outside the work environment. In particular, it focuses on the impact of these values on the personal buying behaviour of employees. The empirical research was undertaken within a case study organisation that produces wine in Spain and involved interviews with senior management, an analysis of company documentation, as well as group discussions with employees supported by an employee survey. The article argues that an organisation's corporate values influence not only its employees' behaviour within the work environment, but also impacts on their global values system outside of the work environment. In particular, this was evident within the employees' buying behaviour practices in relation to supplier loyalty and environmental concern. This has implications for business ethics as an organisation's value system may go beyond the purely business context. Organisations need to be aware of their impact on employees' behaviour outside of the work environment; this is particularly the case for multinational companies working across many cultures.

KEY WORDS: buying behaviour, corporate values, employee behaviour, personal values

Introduction

Previous research undertaken into corporate ethical behaviour has considered the important role of personal values of owners and/or senior managers on the creation of an organisation's corporate value system (i.e. Grojean et al. 2004; Hemingway and

Maclagan, 2004; Meglino and Ravlin, 1998). Furthermore, there has been an increase in the number of articles that suggest a connection between personal values, shared values and productivity, as well as personal values, social values and business behaviour (i.e. Harris and Crane, 2002; Hemingway and Maclagan, 2004). However, there are few articles that have considered the possible influence that an organisation's value system has on the employees' behaviour and values outside the work environment (Agle and Cadewell, 1999). Although the work of Vitell and Ramos-Hidalgo (2006) and Gond and Herrbach's (2006) make a mention of the relationship between corporate values and employee behaviour, it is unclear, as to whether their research relates only to the situation within the work environment. Agle and Cadewell (1999) identified an important gap in the literature related to studies that simultaneously consider the different analysis levels, and the different directions in the causal relations that exist between personal and corporate values. Furthermore, after reviewing the specialized literature, little research of this type exists in the context of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs).

To address this gap in the literature, this research intends to: (1) Confirm that the individual values of SME company owners and/or senior managers have an influence over an organisation's corporate value system; (2) Identify if an organisation's (SME) corporate values influence employees behaviour both within and outside the work environment; (3) Consider simultaneously several causal impact flows (individual – corporate and corporate – individual) and at different hierarchical levels (firstly management and then employees).

Concept and value typology

One of the basic aspects in any research task is the clear and accurate definition of its key components. With regards values, there are multiple approximations to the concept and no unanimity in its definition. Therefore, it was necessary to analyze the different definitions and levels of analysis to find the common elements in these definitions. Schwartz and Bilsky (1987 p. 551) suggest that in almost every definition present in the literature, values are understood as concepts, beliefs, conditions or behaviours that transcend specific situations and guide the selection or evaluation of situation and behaviour. Such values exist within an individual's overall value system, which represents the relationships between and the relative importance of each value to the individual.

A similar approach to the concept of value appears in Fritzsche's (1995) article, in which he defines values as the explicit or implicit conception of what is desirable that has an influence on behaviour, based on appropriate behaviour standards. So, in general, there seems to be a common view that values influence behaviour. In this sense, Kahle (1996) indicates, from the area of social adaptation theory, that values facilitate the adaptation of the individual organisation to the environment, and that they are the fundamental base of acceptable attitudes and behaviour.

A number of classic articles in this field (e.g. Perrow, 1986; Rescher, 1969; Rokeach, 1973; Rousseau, 1985) argue that values are inherently complex and that classification can thus be approached from many angles, so research must distinguish between the different levels at which the values are held (e.g. individual, organisational, institutional, societal, global). Craig and Douglas (2006) suggest values could be examined at different levels: the level of the individual; and the level of the society, where specific groups, organisations and people interact.

Individual values (system)

Taking this concept of value and applying it to the individual, the value system of the individual is the group of personal values, arranged hierarchically on

the basis of the relative importance that each individual assigns them (Fritzsche, 1995). In other words, the value system can be understood as the arranged group of preferences and standards that influence an individual's decisions, actions, conflict resolution and application for social rewards and punishments (Williams, 1979). So, for example, previous articles have shown the relationship between individual values and a person's behaviour (Akaand and Lund, 1994; Singhapakdi and Vitell, 1993), their moral development (Weber, 1993), their job choice (Judge and Bretz, 1992) and/or their behaviour as a consumer (Beatty et al. 1985; Manynwa and Crawford, 2001).

Corporate values

Corporate values can be designated as organisational values or organisational culture (Agle and Cadewell, 1999). So, literature defines them as a group of central values that arise from a group of shared values and beliefs, and that establish the philosophy and way of understanding the organisation's activity (Broms and Gahmberg, 1983; Schein, 1985). Previous articles have analyzed the impact of corporate values on "work motifs/drivers" (Blau and McKinley, 1979), on the organisation's ethics profile (Victor and Cullen, 1988), on the attitude towards social corporate responsibility (Aupperle et al. 1985), and on the excellence/efficiency of management (Peters and Waterman, 1982; Swanson, 1995), among other aspects. In any case, corporate values determine the organisation's behaviour (Agle and Cadewell, 1999; Schwartz, 2001).

Many recent articles have considered that corporate values are determined by the values espoused by company owners and senior managers (Forte, 2004; Guth and Tagiuri, 1965; Hambrick and Brandon, 1988; Harris and Crane, 2002; Hemingway and MacLagan, 2004; Macalister, 2001; Moore, 1999). Moreover, it has been suggested that a lot of managers act in their own interest, by so-called "psychological selfishness" (p.35), that is to say, that they are trying to align their company's behaviour towards a value system similar to their own. This will enable them to feel good as they will not have to face a contradiction between their personal values and their work behaviour (Hemingway, 2005).

In addition other authors have established that a society's group of values and its culture also affect an organisation's corporate values (Agle and Cadewell, 1999; Gond and Herrbach, 2006; Hemingway and MacLagan, 2004; Hunt and Vitell, 1993; Posner and Smidt, 1984), clearly suggesting that there is interaction between individual values, social values and corporate values. Although it should be stressed that little is discussed about the possible influence of corporate values on employees' behaviour outside of the work environment.

Therefore, this research will focus on this literature gap by building on the following themes:

1. Owners and/or managers' personal values can influence the manner of understanding in a business and the creation of a company's activity (Hemingway and MacLagan, 2004; Rallapalli et al. 2000).
2. Employees' personal values, can be affected by the corporate values in the work environment, through (1) the supply of standard rules imposed on work-place behaviour (Schwartz, 2001) and/or (2) the company's role as a socializing agent (Gond and Herrbach, 2006).

Empirical research propositions

Managers and other employees in an organisation continuously make decisions that affect their working behaviour and performance. Moreover, as members of an organisation they confront either implicitly or explicitly the interaction between their individual values and that of the organisation (Liedtka, 1989). So, it may be worth recognizing the distinction between personal values in general and professional values whilst at the work place (Agle and Cadewell, 1999; Rescher, 1969). Hemingway and MacLagan (2004) indicate that these personal and professional values do not always match and this can relate to the level of power an individual has in the workplace. As those with power may be able to bring the organisation's behaviour nearer to their own individual value system and those with less power have to put up with the imposed values (Vitell and Ramos-Hidalgo, 2006). Therefore,

according to Liedtka (1989) we can distinguish between (1) situations in which there is not a value conflict; and (2) situations in which conflict exists.

Meglino et al. (1989), Liedtka (1989) and Agle and Cadewell (1999), among others, state that it is necessary for consistency between both value systems so as not to generate moral – ethic contradictions and remorse, so that greater satisfaction in the work place will be generated and, the organisation's efficiency level will increase. However, employees may have professional value systems that they adopt whilst at work which are different from the value systems they adopt in other social settings.

In their work place, individuals relate with other co-workers in an environment that adopts the organisation's established philosophy and behaviour rules (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001; Trevino, 1986; Vitell and Ramos-Hidalgo, 2006). For these authors, organisational culture has an influence over the subjects thinking, feeling and behaviour. Therefore, the company becomes a socializing reference element for the individual, allowing employees to align themselves with the corporate values. In this sense, the work of Goodaster and Matthews (1982), Velasquez (1983), Ranken (1987), Moore (1999), or Hemingway and MacLagan, (2004), among other authors, stands out as it relates to the company's role as a "corporate moral agency".

Gond and Herrbach (2006), for example, state that social responsibility adopted by the company has a significant influence over corporate behaviour and affects the individual's behaviour within the workplace. In addition, Vitell and Ramos-Hidalgo (2006) analyze the impact of corporate culture and its ethic code in individuals' moral-ethics behaviour and their decision making, in such a way that if the company shows a strong focus on ethics and socially responsible behaviour, it is probable that, workers will identify with the said behaviour in the workplace.

However, Schwartz (2001) indicates that the acceptance of the organisation's rules and the individual's identification with them will differ according to the individual's job satisfaction levels and their ability to choose, whether to adopt the suggested behaviour or not.

However, it is unclear if this identification affects only the employee's work behaviour or if it also affects the employee's wider behaviour inside and

outside of the workplace. This article addresses this gap by exploring two propositions, the first relating to the outcome of previous studies as it is important to underpin the study's structure; whereas the second proposition focuses specifically on addressing the gap in the literature.

Proposition 1(P1):

The individual values of a company's owners and/or senior managers influence an organisation's corporate value system.

Proposition 2:

An organisation's corporate values impact upon...

2.1(P2.1):

An employee's behaviour in the work environment.

2.2(P2.2):

An employee's general value system outside of the work environment.

These are shown in Figure 1, which may also suggest that, the owner's and managers' values may indirectly influence employee's behaviour and values inside and outside the work environment (shown in dotted arrows).

This model addresses the gap identified by Agle and Cadewell (1999) regarding the lack of literature examining different analysis levels. In this case the reference propositions simultaneously approach the analysis of the relationship between corporate values and owners'/managers' personal values, as well as

corporate values and employee's values outside of their work environment, focusing, in particular, on purchasing behaviour and environmental concern.

Methodology

This study is principally an exploratory piece of research undertaken in a qualitative manner. Literature recognizes the suitability of using qualitative type tools to study situations of which there is no previous empirical evidence, or where this evidence is limited (Yin, 1994). Also, there are a lot of studies that have taken these type of tools into account to analyze moral-ethical concepts in company management (i.e. Loza, 2004; Melé, 2005; Ullmer and Sellnow, 2000), which gives support to the approach adopted in this article.

The case study that is discussed in this article is part of a larger research project involved in analyzing different influences on the management and functioning of SMEs. The fundamental objective for this specific case is to verify what the workers' identification level is with their company's corporate values and, if that is the case, if the said values have repercussions on their behaviour outside the work environment. Additionally, the article aims to identify and evaluate the main moral/ethical implications for management that derive from the obtained results.

Regarding the process of gathering information, the study follows the recommendations made by Eisenhardt (1989), McCutcheon and Meredith (1993) and Yin (1994), among other authors, regarding triangulation and the use of several evidence sources. Interviews (of around 45 min each) took place with the company president, representing the owners; with the managing director and with the person in charge of quality control, representing the senior management; in addition two group discussions were undertaken with 10 employees in each group. These groups were moderated by the authors using a topic guide and also lasted approximately 45–50 min. The semi structured interviews and the group discussion sessions were recorded and transcribed. A content analysis approach was used to analyse the transcriptions.

In order to eliminate a possible bias that workers may communicate in public, 15 questionnaires were

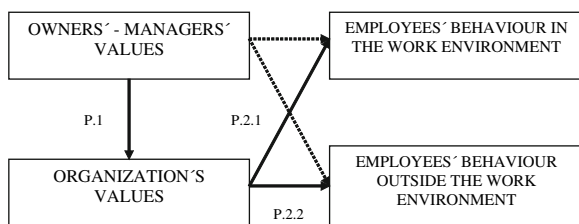


Figure 1. Values interaction system.

handed out at random (33% of the total non-management employees) so that employees could answer questions anonymously regarding their degree of identification with the company's values, and their behaviour inside and outside of the workplace (in terms of buying behaviour and environmental concern). Data was also gathered from internal leaflets such as the company's strategic plan, press releases and their sustainability report to provide additional information about the company's espoused values.

Bodega Pirineos: the case study

Firm background

Bodega Pirineos Ltd. produces wine under "Protected Geographical Indication" *Somontano*. This is a wine-producing region formed by 44 municipalities located in north-eastern Spain. Its regulatory authority has registered 22 wineries, 450 winegrowers and 4,326 hectares of vineyards. Its wines enjoy a high level of recognition in both the Spanish and international market, placing them amongst the best known wines in Spain, together with *Rioja*, *Ribera del Duero*, *Navarra*, *Priorato* and *La-Mancha* PDOs, amongst others. In addition, the PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) *Somontano* is vitally important for the area's economy and society, employing a large number of the inhabitants in the area, getting incentives for the vineyard owners to invest in renewing farming technology and equipment, and improving the service infrastructure to attract visitors and tourists.

Bodegas Pirineos Ltd was one of the enterprises that promoted the creation of *Somontano PDO*, in the year 1984. Founded in 1964, its new legal composition of Bodegas Pirineos was established in 1993. Its ownership structure is mixed, as it is shared by the partners of the former cooperative, the regional government of Aragon (public institution), financial institutions, *Compañía Vitivinícola Aragonesa*, *Vñedos y Crianzas del Alto Aragón* (the latter two are also wineries belonging to the *Somontano PDO*), and to a lesser extent by a farmers' association. This situation leads to a blend of traditional elements typical of the countryside and an informal management approach with elements of the latest business management trends. And it also contributes to the

promotion of other objectives other than profits (e.g. social responsibility, agriculture needs, environmental respect, sustainability, innovation).

The company employees 53 staff and in 2003 (last available data), it sold 2,520,000 bottles, which represent 27.4% of the total production of 9,197,145 bottles of *Somontano PDO* wine sold in that year (data provided by the *PDO Somontano Regulating Authority* and Bodegas Pirineos Ltd.). Its markets are both national and international (Germany, U.K., U.S.A. and Japan). For this reason Bodegas Pirineos is considered one of the driving forces among the *PDO Somontano* wineries.

Results

The individual values of the managers and owners have influenced the corporate value system

It is obvious in this case, that the values of the company are strongly influenced by the senior management team's personal values, as well as that of the owners. In order to fully explore this, aspects related to the organisation's concern for the environment and loyalty to suppliers were taken as reference. These values were the ones that were espoused most strongly by the management team. So, for instance, in the case of environmental concern, the managing director points out that:

Well, ... I understand that our company is small, but...you see we talk about environmental deterioration and you think... you think about what you could do to contribute to slowing down that deterioration. And the truth is that there's little that I can do... maybe do my bit through my company's activity, making its process more respectful of the environment... that its environmental impact is the least possible.

This complements what was said by the manager in charge of quality control:

I don't understand how it's possible to have reached the present environmental situation... you see pictures on television of cities immensely polluted, news related to both the Poles' thawing, great droughts and torrential rain, sea catastrophes... and you realize that something must be done... even if it's not a lot. I think that in Bodega Pirineos there are a lot of us who think

that something must be done... although as a company there isn't much that we can do... but, what if we all did the same thing? Don't you agree? Surely the Global Impact would be different if we all showed some interest as individuals.

Regarding the owners' values, through the company's president's opinion we discover:

Look, you must consider that the enlargement of financial profit is not Bodega Pirineos' only aim. We directly or indirectly get together a large number of people, people that work on the land that depend on the sustainability of their agricultural activity and our commercial activity... So I think that we must try to find a point where both criteria complement each other as much as possible. And you already know that a big part of the company's shares belongs to public administration and savings banks, that intend to develop and consolidate the commitment to looking after the environment.

The fact that in this case the company's prime objective is not simply the enlargement of profit but also includes additional objectives as important or even more important than profit, these appear in an explicit way through the company's definition of its objectives:

Bodega Pirineos looks for the satisfaction of those concerned: consumers from all over the world, the staff at the winery, the profitability of the shareholders and the satisfaction of our main suppliers, the grape suppliers, as well as the rest of the suppliers, based on the very high company standards, and finally that of the community, always with an appropriate environmental, ethic and social behaviour.

So, it is possible that when the profit is not the only objective, it is easier that certain individual and social values can also prevail.

With regard to the emphasis on loyalty to suppliers, it is unclear, as to whether the philosophy that controls its acquisitions comes from its senior managers' value systems or if it comes about from external training. In Bodega Pirineos both the members of the Advisory Council and the management team have a high experience of training in business administration and management, which is why they are familiar with the management techniques that are most suitable for each situation:

It's been a while now since we talked about having stable relationships not only with the distributors and clients but also with the suppliers, hasn't it? Well, you should know that for us, once our suppliers meet our demands it's a lot easier to go on working with them... less uncertainty, more time for other activities... in short, a more efficient and simple procedure... but without them relaxing... that's why we have a supplier policy A-supplier B, so that they know that we trust them, that we want to work with them always, but they always have to do it right, they shouldn't relax.

Anyway, it is true that regardless of the origin of this thought, both the ideas of the owners and the managers about supplier loyalty are reflected in the corporate values and the company's policy. So, considering evidence from the in depth interviews and from the company's strategic plan, we have the information to back up the first proposition of our study, the shareholders' and managers' individual values influence the corporate values system.

The corporate values influence on the value system and on the company's employees behaviour

The initial evidence to suggest that there may be a relationship between corporate values and employee behaviour came from the interviews with the company president and its quality control manager. They commented on an increasing commitment of all the employees to the corporate values system and this was also reflected in the behaviour of employees inside and outside the work environment. In order to test this idea, environmental concerns and long-term relationships with suppliers were also taken as the reference.

Therefore, in the group discussion sessions, sentences like the following stand out:

1. "If the company works well almost always relying on a permanent group of suppliers, why shouldn't I, as a consumer, be favoured by similar behaviour?"
2. "It's true... If something works for you, you have to buy it again... you save time and you know that it's going to work out as you expect it to... before I used to pay more attention to the price and I'd change and I would try new things almost all the time and... sometimes I got it right and sometimes I didn't... here we work with the same

suppliers almost all the time and we're doing fine... I now try to do the same thing in my house when I shop for myself and its true... lately I almost always get it right with my shopping... I know now what I want and what I get out of each product... Do I think that I'm a faithful consumer? Well I think I am, I've seen that here it really works for the company... well then this loyalty must be benefiting me as well, even if I'm not completely aware of it."

3. "At the beginning we didn't want the ISO14000 rules to apply because we had to invest more time in certain waste management activities, we had to make a bigger effort and I didn't think that the impact that our company would have on the environment would be significant... but if the management say that it has to be done this way there must be a reason... the company works very well and it's them that take the decisions, so there must be a reason... well, the earnings from bonus schemes also helped."
4. "...Yes, and you should also consider something that we've mentioned before. When we adhered to the ISO14000 we realised that the system is more demanding and that we reduce the environmental impact... Even though it wasn't very harmful for the environment before, now it's even more efficient and respectful and... hey, now we have to work harder. I now appreciate more companies that also try to behave this way... If when I go shopping I hesitate when there is more than one option and there's one that shows concern for the environment, I'll take that one... well, if there isn't a huge difference in the price, everything has a limit, eh?"

In the first two sentences we can see how, as a result of the company's buying behaviour, the employees notice the benefits of supplier loyalty that lead to a similar attitude in their individual buying behaviour.

Regarding the introduction of a management system that is more concerned about the environment, there is a certain reticence amongst employees at the introduction of the system on the perception that the job will be more demanding. However, the system countered the initial prejudices and aligned

employees' behaviour with the new corporate values.

This fact allows us to confirm the 2.1 proposition, which stated that the corporate values affect the individual's behaviour in the workplace.

In addition the research suggests that corporate values may influence an individual's values system behaviour outside the work environment, particularly in the area of buying behaviour. It seems that workers identify with and assimilate some of the corporate values in their own personal value system. Perhaps the good working atmosphere, the closeness of relationships between management and employees and the good results achieved by the company, act as the force of this identification.

However, it is possible that in many occasions the individuals who participate in a group discussion with fellow employees do not provide totally honest responses and may feel the need to answer in the way they should. Attempts were made to reduce this by: (1) Avoiding the presence of senior management team at the employees' group discussions; (2) Distributing a brief anonymous questionnaire randomly among the employees, with the sole objective of verifying the sincerity of the answers in the group sessions. The results of these questionnaires showed that 100% of the employees identified with the organisation's aspirations in terms of environmental concern and supplier loyalty. Furthermore, 87% stated that their own buying behaviour now demonstrated loyalty to certain brands and shops, while 73% now purchased environmentally friendly products.

Discussion

The analysis of this case study shows interesting facts regarding the influence of the shareholders' and managers' values on the corporate values system (proposition 1). But it also confirms that the company's values not only affect employees' behaviour in the work environment (proposition 2.1), but may in certain occasions impact on the global values system of these individuals outside the work environment (proposition 2.2). The company may therefore have a responsibility that goes beyond the mere business context. This idea was also evident in the debate about corporate moral agency (French,

1979; Goodpaster and Matthews, 1982; Hemingway and MacLagan, 2004; Moore, 1999; Ranken, 1987; Velasques, 1983), although it apparently talks about the company as a moral agent in general and it does not insist on the relationship between corporate values and individual values, nor in the study of specific situations (e.g. individual's buying behaviour). Another similar idea was suggested in a Vinson's et al. (1977) work, but was not empirically tested. Nevertheless the owners and senior managers responsible for establishing the company's values must be aware that their decisions impact far wider than in the work environment. It is clear that the workers at Bodega Pirineos seek to adopt supplier loyalty and are willing to pay a relatively higher price for an environmentally friendly product. Authors such as McCarthy and Shrum (1999), Thøgersen (1999) Laroche et al. (2001), Fraj et al. (2006), have stated that individual values based on demographic, psychological and economical background impacts on the environmental influences on buyer behaviour. However, they do not talk about the role of employers on such behaviour.

It is necessary to note that the influence of corporate values on individuals' values system is not immediate and that employees may need time to be persuaded that certain values are correct. For example, in the work environment there may be an initial reluctance to adopt the complete corporate values system. But in all cases, it is likely that the corporate values system ultimately influences a company's organisation, selection, training and penalty/reward system (Hemingway and MacLagan, 2004; Moon, 2002). Although research is needed to determine whether an imposed system can generate a stronger resistance and will be less likely to extend to the outside work environment, unless the worker can clearly witness the benefits of the imposed values.

Regarding the company's size, it is very possible that in smaller companies, or that of a family business, the relationships between shareholders, managers and workers are much more personal and closer. So the chance that there is an identification of the individual's values with the company's increases, while in larger companies where the distance between management and workers is larger and the relationships are more anonymous and impersonal, it may be more difficult.

Conclusions and implications of the study

Although this article has only considered one case study organisation, in a specific context: the Spanish SME sector, this exploratory study reconfirms that the owners' and/or a company's managers' values effectively influence the company's corporate values system reinforcing the evidence from previous research.

Secondly that the study suggests that a company's corporate values influence not only its employees' behaviour in the work environment, but also, under certain circumstances, affect their global values system outside of the work environment. In particular, this is evident in the buying behaviour practices in relation to supplier loyalty and environmental concern. Previous articles (Gond and Herrbach, 2006; Vitell and Ramos-Hidalgo, 2006) stated this possibility in a work environment, but did not identify the influence outside the work environment. This exploratory article has accentuated the need for further research in this area.

In regard to the business ethics implications that can result from this study, companies may be moral agents and their values system may go beyond the purely business context. So corporate values have bigger implications and may be responsible for matters additional to the ones that were originally being considered. In this sense the companies themselves must be aware of the impact that their activity has and guide the owners', managers' and corporations' values to a philosophy that tries to minimize the negative impact of their activity. It may be necessary in this sense to invest in specific training.

In those cases in which unethical behaviours of the companies are identified it may be necessary to intervene penalizing these actions so that workers, as well as society in general understand what the acceptable and desired behaviour is. Supporting this with communication campaigns for these workers to make them aware of what is right and what is wrong. This may be particularly important for multinational companies working across many cultures. As perceptions and beliefs will be different, according to the socio-cultural context on which we stand, it will be necessary to identify previously what is the predominant value scale so as to be able to understand the consequences of each decision and action. Where it is that organisations develop a sustainable behaviour it will be necessary for its actions to be

oriented towards production and management techniques that adopt values, beliefs and environmental respect behaviour (Harris and Crane, 2002), being aware that, moreover, this decision could generate additional positive externalities through its workers' outside work behaviour.

Regarding the impact of corporate values on an individual's buying behaviour, if those in charge of sales are able to identify a society's values system, they will be able to offer a marketing-mix suitable for its profile. But if they can also identify the main characteristics of a company's philosophy and the impact of said ideology on its workers they might be able to create and exploit specific market niches offering products specifically adapted to them.

Overall this article identifies a gap in the literature, it has explored that gap through exploratory research using a single case study, however, there still remains a significant amount of research requiring to be done in this area to reinforce or refute the ideas put forward here.

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